WHEN CARRYING KEEP BLADE SIDE UP

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Prosecutors Divided on Garrison's Conduct

District Attorneys at L.A. Session Give Views on Implications of Kennedy Probe

BY BOB JACKSON
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The nation's prosecutors are apparently divided over the conduct and implications of New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's investigation into the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

A sampling of opinion among delegates to the National District Attorneys Assn. convention here Thursday showed that many are skeptical about his evidence and privately critical of the way he has handled the case.

Others, however, are quick to defend him.

Richard E. Gerstein, state's attorney of Dade County, Fla., said Garrison "contacted me several months ago when he believed he had uncovered a conspiracy, and asked my help.

"I interviewed several persons in the greater Miami area on his behalf, including some American citizens and some persons of Cuban background."

Learned 'Fragments'

Gerstein said he was only able to learn "fragments" of Garrison's case from his own interviews. But he added:

"I know Jim Garrison and I have complete confidence in his integrity and ability. I do not feel he would embark on such an investigation unless he had good cause."

Joseph Murray, prosecuting attorney of Ashland County, Ohio, said he believed Garrison was trying his case "too much on the outside." "We're generally reluctant to try our cases out of court or give so much information out beforehand that it tends to jeopardize the prosecution of the case.

"I hesitate to say Garrison has been a publicity hound since I hope he had evidence before he made such charges," Murray said.

Opinion on Russo

Of Perry Raymond Russo, Garrison's apparent prime witness, Murray said:

"The guy has changed his story several times. I hope Garrison's got more evidence than that."

Some prosecutors felt Garrison is doing his best under the circumstances.

"He had a duty to present this case," said Robert Russell, district attorney of El Paso County, Colo.

"I think Garrison has handled the situation very well. Once the story leaked out in the newspapers it put him in a bad position."

But another prosecutor —Edmund H. Jeschke of Onondaga County, N.Y.— said of Garrison:

"The investigation should have been handled a little more discreetly."

And Harry C. Templeton of Winchester, Tenn., who is district attorney for a seven-county area, remarked:

"I'm not impressed, and I don't think the investigation is in the public interest."

Templeton said if he obtained similar leads, "I certainly would make the information available to other authorities such as the FBI instead of proceeding on my own."

In a luncheon address, Joseph A. Ball of Long Beach, a private attorney who was counsel to the Warren Commission, said that body investigated "more important evidence than anything I've seen in the newspapers lately."

25,000 Witnesses

"Over 25,000 witnesses were interviewed by the FBI in this investigation," Ball said.

"Agents combed the French Quarter in New Orleans and interviewed homosexuals. They found no evidence that Lee Harvey Oswald had ever associated with anyone there." (The Warren Commission found that Oswald alone was responsible for Mr. Kennedy's death.)

About 250 prosecutors and their wives are attending the four-day convention at the Statler Hilton, which closes Saturday.